



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ETHICS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

BY J. C. FLÜGEL.

I.

PROBABLY the most dramatic revelation of modern science is the struggle for existence. The conception of Nature "red in tooth and claw," in which life evolved slowly and painfully as the result of constant war among all living things—a war in which defeat meant death—was bound to exercise a profound effect upon religion and philosophy. It is, however, more particularly in the domain of ethical thought that we should expect to find the most marked influence of such a view. Regarded from the physical, or even from the physiological, standpoint, the struggle for existence is a mere interplay of forces. From the point of view of ethics, it is seen as a process which is inextricably bound up with the weal or woe of all the living beings on earth, and which must inevitably affect our conceptions of what constitutes this weal or woe. It is, therefore, not surprising that, from Spencer onwards, moralists have frequently studied ethics in the light of evolution. There is, however, another method of considering the relations between ethics and the struggle for existence, which has less frequently been attempted. This method consists in examining the struggle for existence from the point of view of ethics. It was adopted by Huxley in his well known Romanes lecture of 1893, but has not been followed up to the extent that its interest and importance would lead one to expect. The present article, it is hoped, may constitute a very small step towards the advancement of this somewhat neglected branch of ethical study.

The question from which it starts is this:—Is the struggle for existence in human society desirable or undesirable from the point of view of the ethical conceptions of our time, and should we, accordingly—supposing we have any power in

the matter at all—endeavor to mitigate or to increase, to abolish or to perpetuate, this struggle?

As soon as we approach this question, however, it would seem that we are confronted with two serious difficulties. The first of these—which is common to all attempts at the application of ethics to practical problems—is due to the want of agreement as to the nature of the goal of the moral life, the *summum bonum*, which should in the last resort determine all our judgments of good or bad. This want of agreement as to the ultimate moral criterion must necessarily lead to a considerable narrowing of our task, if it is to be kept within reasonable limits. It is obviously impossible, within a single article, to examine the moral aspects of the struggle for existence in the light of all the theories of the *summum bonum* which can claim adherents. I propose, therefore, in the present case, to confine our consideration to two of these theories—the theory of the good as pleasure, and the theory of the good as perfection, the highest possible development and function of our essential human nature.¹

Both of these theories enjoy at least one great advantage for our purpose. Even among those who regard neither pleasure nor the perfection of human nature as themselves constituting the ultimate good, there are few (at any rate among Western thinkers) who will deny that pleasure and the perfection of mankind tend in a high degree to accompany the ultimate good; so that those conditions which produce a greater amount of pleasure or human perfection may be expected in the long run to produce also a greater amount of the ultimate good, whatever this may be.

¹ I am aware that these two criteria are very far from being independent of one another. From Aristotle onwards, the connection between pleasure and perfect function has been repeatedly emphasised by writers on psychology and ethics, and McDougall (*Social Psychology*, ch. v.) has recently suggested that the two corresponding conceptions of the *summum bonum* are ultimately the same. Nevertheless, I believe that the two points of view are sufficiently distinct to justify their separation in a discussion such as the present, where it is impossible to enter deeply into ultimate ethical or psychological considerations.

The second difficulty referred to above lies in the fact that there is at the present moment no very clear and generally accepted view as to the extent and manner in which the struggle for existence is actually operative in human society. Opinions range between the two extremes, according to one of which it is considered that, as a natural law, the struggle for existence does, and always must, manifest itself among mankind just as in the infra-human world; while according to the other, it is thought that man's power over nature places him well outside its reach, and that all that is required to abolish the last traces of this primitive struggle, is a more equitable distribution of wealth and a more charitable and reasonable attitude in international and inter-racial relations. It is, however, impossible to discuss how far the struggle for existence in human society of today is ethically desirable or undesirable until we have arrived at least at some provisional agreement as to how far and in what way it is actually operative in such society, whether its action is increasing or decreasing and whether it can be, or is likely to be, abolished. As a preliminary inquiry, we must, therefore, turn to such evidence of the real state of affairs as is available.

II.

It is a widely known but frequently neglected fact, that the theory of evolution was suggested independently to Darwin and to Wallace by Malthus's doctrine of over-population. This doctrine implies a struggle for existence among men in virtue of their tendency to increase more rapidly than the available supply of food. Darwin and Wallace showed that this tendency, holding good, as it does, not only of mankind but of the whole of organic creation, is, if considered in relation to the equally fundamental tendency towards variation, capable of explaining almost the whole mechanism of evolution. It is somewhat remarkable that, while this elaboration and extension of the doctrine by Darwin and Wallace has now met with almost universal acceptance, the original proposition of

Malthus regarding the struggle for existence among mankind, which is perhaps the most interesting part of the whole theory from the purely human and practical point of view, should have received comparatively little attention. Nevertheless, few, if any, economic writers of the first importance have ever disputed its essential points. Moreover, an impartial examination of recent scientific data bearing on the question seems very considerably to strengthen Malthus's position. We will refer briefly to five lines of evidence, which have of late become available.

1. International vital statistics show that Malthus's contentions as to the difference between the actual and possible increase of the human race were amply justified. Russia with a birth rate of just under 50 per thousand (which is probably smaller than that of India or China), and New Zealand with a death rate of 10 per thousand or less, show that an unrestrained increase of population would amount to at least 4 per cent per annum, a figure which would lead to a doubling of population every $17\frac{1}{2}$ years—a period considerably shorter than that of 25 years originally suggested by Malthus. This figure would, moreover, imply a more than fifty fold increase of population in a century, a rate which even the most optimistic would hesitate to pronounce possible in the case of our food supply. The fact that the actual increase of population was very much smaller than the theoretically possible increase, was attributed by Malthus to two causes, which he called the “positive” and the “preventive” checks respectively. The action of these two checks has also become measurable by means of modern statistics. The “positive” check is seen in the fact that the death rate of most countries is considerably more than 10 per thousand, showing that human life in these countries is shorn of part of its possible duration; while the “preventive” check is manifested in the comparatively low and still declining birth rates of the majority of the more civilised countries.

2. Modern statistics show, again, that these “positive” and “preventive” checks are complementary and are found

in inverse proportion to one another. In the great majority of cases, countries which have high birth rates have also high death rates, countries with a declining birth rate have also a declining death rate, while the few countries of to-day with rising birth rates show also a tendency towards a rising death rate. As Malthus saw, this inverse proportion between the "positive" and "preventive" checks constitutes a very strong argument in favour of his view. If there really exists an insufficiency of food to keep alive all the children that are born, the larger the number of births, the larger will be the number of deaths, since the population cannot increase more rapidly than the supply of nutriment permits. So long as there exists a pressure of population upon the means of subsistence, it follows likewise that the smaller the number of births, the smaller need be the number of deaths from want of nutriment. Malthus endeavoured to prove the existence of this inverse proportion between the "positive" and the "preventive" checks, so far as was possible in his time. The amazingly close correspondence between birth and death rates revealed by modern statistics furnishes a much more ample and satisfactory verification, and shows that the corollary which Malthus drew from his doctrine of over-population holds good for modern conditions with greater strictness than even the most enthusiastic supporters of the doctrine would have ventured to predict.

3. If, then, there exists an insufficiency of food, we should expect to find evidence of actual difficulty of obtaining it in sufficient quantity. Such evidence is not far to seek. Professor Bowley² has calculated that the average earning of eight million adult working men in this country (without allowing for periods of unemployment) is about thirty shillings a week, while 32 per cent of this number earn twenty-five shillings a week or less. On the other hand we have the interesting estimate of Mr. Seeböhm Rowntree,³ who calculated the sum necessary to keep a family of five

²*Daily Mail Year Book*, 1912.

³*Ibid.*

(two parents and three children) in full physiological efficiency. According to this estimate 23s.8d. was the smallest income on which such a result could be obtained, even if it were spent in the most scientific manner possible. This was in York some years ago, and there is no doubt that the estimate would have to be increased somewhat for life in London at the present day. As nothing whatsoever is here allowed for luxuries, illness, insurance, or unemployment, it is sufficiently evident that there must be a very large number of families, which cannot, under present circumstances, be adequately supplied with even the bare necessities of life.

4. The actual amount of food per head throughout the civilised world has been calculated by M. Giroud⁴ for the years 1887 and 1907 on the basis of a painstaking research into the production and importation of food in all countries for which evidence was available. M. Giroud's figures for 1887 were criticised by M. Elysée Reclus, who, however, eventually withdrew his objection. The calculations have since then, so far as I am aware, remained unchallenged. The total amount of food per head, expressed in calories, is, for 1887, 2,840 and for 1907, 2,790. When it is remembered that the amount required for full physiological efficiency is 3,400 (Armand Gautier) or 3,500 calories (Atwater), it is seen that there is a very considerable deficiency, especially in the later year.⁵

5. In the above considerations we have confined ourselves, for the sake of simplicity, to that prime necessity, food. But there is little doubt that the facts are much the

⁴ *Populations et Subsistances*.

⁵ A convenient summary of the facts constituting these first four lines of evidence will be found in "Wages and the Cost of Living" by Dr. C. V. Drysdale, a paper written for the Economic and Statistical Section of the British Association 1913, but rejected by the Organizing Committee and subsequently published by the Malthusian League. In view of the fact that at the meeting at which this paper should have been read there was a complete failure to point out any effectual remedy for the increased cost of living—the question to which this particular meeting was entirely devoted—the rejection of the paper constitutes a striking example of the undue neglect of the important matters we have been considering.

same as regards all other necessities. The National Census of Production for 1907 and the voluntary census taken by the Board of Agriculture in 1908⁶ revealed the fact that the net value of the new material wealth annually available for consumption in the United Kingdom amounted to about £25 per head. This is surely an astonishingly small total for one of the wealthiest countries in the world and indicates that there must be a great shortage of the necessities of life among considerable sections of our population.

This brief survey of economic facts would seem to justify us in assuming that there exists to-day a struggle for existence in human society very similar in general character to that found in the animal world; a struggle which is, no doubt, considerably modified both as to its form and its effects by human institutions, but which exists nevertheless, and cannot be abolished as long as there continues to be a pressure of population upon the necessities of life.

But although the struggle exists, the facts do not justify us in regarding it as a necessary and permanent feature of human society. It is clear that there are two possible ways of bringing the struggle to an end: (1) by a more rapid increase in the production of necessities, so that there may be an ample supply for all who are born; (2) a less rapid rate of reproduction, so that the increase of population may no longer tend to outstrip the increase of the necessities of life. Furthermore, it is evident that both these means of putting an end to the struggle are, to a very considerable extent, in process of realisation. The supply of necessities available in the civilised countries of the world has increased at an unprecedented rate during the last century; but this of itself, as Mill and other economists have pointed out, has not put an end to the struggle for existence, but has merely enabled larger populations to live in much the same condition as the smaller populations before them. During the last thirty or forty years, how-

⁶ Both conveniently summarized in *The Nation's Wealth* (ch. 4) by Mr. Chiozza Money.

ever, there has been manifested in most civilised countries a strong and increasing tendency towards a slower rate of reproduction, by means of a voluntary limitation of the number of births.

These two factors, taken together, give us good ground for asserting that there exists, in civilised communities, a strong tendency towards the abolition of the struggle for existence—a tendency which, it is quite possible, may become completely realised in the course of the next half century. The only fact which prevents this realisation taking place within the next few years is the comparatively high birth rate among the poorest classes, who have not yet acquired the habit of voluntary control of reproduction already prevalent among the better-off. The penetration of such habits throughout the whole community would seem, however, to be only a matter of time. As Havelock Ellis has recently pointed out in *The Task of Social Hygiene*, a low birth rate seems to be an almost inevitable accompaniment of a high state of civilisation. Indeed the phenomenon is but a particular instance of that general antagonism between individuation and genesis, to which Spencer called attention. Thus all efforts to improve the condition of the poorer classes—in particular those efforts which aim at an improvement in education—tend indirectly to reduce the birth rate of these classes, and thus to mitigate the struggle for existence. It is also possible, however, to aim *directly* at a reduction of the birth rate. At the present moment the forces working to this end are comparatively small, but it seems fairly certain that if only a small proportion of the philanthropic effort now devoted to the mitigation of poverty were directed towards its abolition by means of a vigorous campaign against the high birth rate of the poor, the struggle for the mere necessities of existence would come to an end within a surprisingly short space of time. On the other hand, it is, of course, equally true, that, by a determined effort to maintain the high rate of reproduction among the poor, this tendency towards the extinction of the struggle for

Vol. XXV.—No. 4.

existence may be postponed, perhaps for an indefinite period.

To sum up our consideration of the actual facts concerning the struggle for existence, we have found:

(1) That the struggle for existence is actually operative in human society of today, in virtue of the inadequacy of the supply of necessities to meet the demands of the existing populations;

(2) That this struggle is, however, tending to cease;

(3) That it lies within human power to hasten forward or to postpone the time when this tendency shall become realised.

In view of these conclusions, the ethical problem, which we raised at the beginning and to which we shall turn in a few moments, acquires an added interest. It is a practical question of the greatest importance for all those—statesmen, capitalists, philanthropists and others—who are concerned on a large scale with shaping the destinies of the human race; it is, moreover, a question of exceptional urgency at the present moment. If the abolition of the struggle for existence among mankind is desirable, then it is surely our duty to help forward the tendency toward its abolition, which, as we have seen, already exists. If, on the other hand, the struggle for existence plays on the whole, a beneficent rôle in human life, then it becomes equally our duty to oppose this tendency. In any case, the question ceases to be of merely academic interest, but becomes one, the answer to which must profoundly affect our attitude toward the gravest social problems of our time.

Hitherto we have considered the struggle for existence as it is manifested between individuals of the same group or community. There is, however, another aspect of the struggle for existence among mankind—the struggle between different groups, nations, or races. This is indeed regarded by some as the most characteristic expression of the struggle for existence among mankind. Nevertheless I do not intend to enter upon a full consideration of it here: principally, for reasons of space; but partly also, because

it is, for obvious reasons, receiving at the present day a much greater amount of public attention than is the (at least equally important) struggle between individuals, which we have hitherto been considering; and partly too, because it is possible to show in a few words that, in general, very much the same considerations apply both to the struggle between groups and the struggle between individuals. The struggle between nations and races exists, and is manifested in wars, in commercial and industrial competition, and, generally, in the struggle of populations for the food supply of the world. But, like the struggle between individuals, this aspect of the struggle—in spite of the present sudden outburst of military activity—is nevertheless, on the whole, undoubtedly exhibiting a tendency to cease. This tendency may be traced partly to the growth of moral and political traditions in favour of peace and arbitration, partly to a general preoccupation with peaceful rather than with warlike enterprises, and partly, as it is the merit of Mr. Norman Angell to have so clearly pointed out, to the fact that war has to a great extent lost its character as a genuine expression of the struggle for existence.⁷ Owing to the vast extent and complexity of modern international economic relations, the leading nations of the world are no longer opposed to one another as single, independent, economic units, but the prosperity of one nation is, in an infinity of ways, bound up with the prosperity of all others. Similarly, the merely economic struggle of the different populations for the world's supply of necessities, is also tending to cease; and by the very same mechanism that is bringing to an end the struggle for existence within the boundaries of a single community, viz., the less rapid rate of reproduction manifested in the declining birth rates of nearly all the more civilised nations of the world.

Thus the struggle between groups is in the same condition as the struggle between individuals. It still exists,

⁷ The tendency here referred to is clearly brought out in the demand now being made by many different sections of the community that the present war should, if possible, be made a "war to end war."

but there are powerful forces tending towards its extinction. Further, its cessation or its continuance are matters which are very largely within human control. It is possible for the struggle for existence between civilised nations to come to an end within a few years, if the requisite political and economic—and, in view of present events, we may perhaps add, military—measures are undertaken; on the other hand, the struggle may be prolonged for decades, or perhaps, even for centuries, if warlike tradition is sufficiently fostered and populations continue to grow at a sufficiently rapid rate.

III.

After this lengthy preliminary excursion into the domain of sociology and economics, we are now in a position to turn with much greater interest and profit to the purely ethical part of our inquiry. In so doing, we will confine ourselves first to the ethical aspects of the struggle between individuals. This struggle, as we have seen, manifests itself primarily in the inability of a considerable section of the population to obtain an adequate supply of the necessities of life. The first and most indispensable of these necessities is food, but there are many other things commonly classed among the necessities of life—such as housing, clothing, fuel—which are only of slightly less importance. Our review of facts has shown (and indeed it is pretty generally recognised) that among the poorer classes of even the most civilised nations there is frequently a lack of all these things. How is this condition of affairs to be judged in the light of the two ethical criteria that we decided to use—pleasure and perfection? From the point of view of pleasure, there can be little doubt that it must be utterly condemned. The want of the necessities of life inevitably causes pain—the pains of hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, as well as smaller discomforts too numerous to mention. Besides these immediate pains, there are, too, remote effects to be considered, such as suffering caused by illness or by stunted growth consequent on exposure or insufficient nourishment.

From the point of view of perfection, it would seem at first sight that our condemnation must be equally unhesitating. Perfection implies complete development of life, whereas want of any of the necessities of life inevitably hinders such development, causing, on the contrary, impairment of life, both in quantity and quality. In fact, want of the actual necessities of life must inevitably be judged bad according to any standard which considers the individual life a good. It is only a pessimistic philosophy (pessimistic at least as far as this life is concerned) which can approve the struggle for existence in so far as it manifests itself in an actual shortage of necessities.

So far the answer to our problem seems simple enough; but a little further consideration will show that there are grave objections to be met, before we can agree to the universal applicability of this solution. It is true that a cessation of the struggle for existence would afford more opportunities for the perfection of human nature. But is this nature so constituted that it can avail itself of these opportunities for its own development? The human race, like all other existing races of earth, has a history of struggle behind it, has become what it is in virtue of success in the struggle, and has instincts and impulses which are, to a very great extent, adapted to an environment of struggle. Are we not demanding far too great a power of change in human nature, when we ask that it shall adjust itself in a few years to a state of peace and plenty, whereas throughout its history it has been used to a condition of struggle and scarcity? The necessity of finding food is, after all, one of the prime motives of human activity, just as it is the most fundamental motive to action throughout the animal world. If the urgency of this motive is removed, will not mankind fall into a condition of slothful ease, the very opposite to that of the perfect activity which we desire? Or, even worse than this, is it not possible that the absence of the usual stimulus to work will produce such a state of idleness and inactivity, that all progress will be stopped and even the necessary work of the world be inadequately

performed; so that the struggle for existence will begin again owing to the insufficient production of necessities, our whole attempt to abolish it being thus rendered abortive? If this objection should prove valid, it would constitute a veritable *reductio ad absurdum* of any proposal to abolish the struggle for existence, and it behooves us to examine it conscientiously in the light of any facts which seem to have a bearing on it.

Although the struggle for existence still holds sway over human society as a whole, there are (and have been in nearly every large community) a very considerable number of individuals who are amply provided with all the necessities of life. It would seem that these individuals should afford a useful criterion for judging the validity of the above objection. If the struggle for existence really supplies an indispensable stimulus to human activity, then we should expect that those individuals among whom there is no struggle for existence would be less active and efficient than the other members of the community. If, on the other hand, they are just as active and as useful as their poorer fellows, it is evident that the struggle for existence is not a necessary and indispensable incentive to human endeavor, and that it is quite possible for the human race to continue to progress without it.

Now, apart from the speeches and writings of the more extreme socialists, it is fairly generally admitted at the present day that the ranks of the well to do include many of the most useful and indispensable members of society. It is indeed impossible to deny that a very great proportion of the work of supervision, organization, and initiation, upon which modern methods of production so intimately depend, is due to men whose means place them beyond the range of the struggle for existence. Or, neglecting economic considerations altogether, there is little doubt that we should find that the best producers of artistic, literary, or scientific work, as well as the most distinguished members of the "professions," although not as a rule possessors of great wealth, have nevertheless, in the great majority of cases,

been used to an ample supply of necessities and of the less expensive luxuries from childhood upwards. There are, of course, a considerable number of idlers and incapables among the rich, but it is probable that the proportion is no larger (and very possibly a good deal smaller) than among the poor. We may, then, fairly safely conclude that, under certain circumstances at any rate, human nature is able to adapt itself to conditions of life involving no struggle for existence, without serious impairment of activity.

But although we admit that human nature is capable of such an adaptation, this must not blind us to the fact that there are circumstances under which the adaptation is difficult, if not impossible, of accomplishment. It may be easy for an individual to work hard, even without the stimulus afforded by the struggle for existence, if from youth upwards the motives have been other than those connected with the mere maintenance of life. But with individuals of mature age, whose principal stimulus to exertion has been the fear of, or presence of, actual want, it may be very difficult to bring about the substitution of motives which a cessation of the struggle for existence renders necessary. Thus it may take an appreciable time before our proletariat can become as completely adapted to a condition of plenty, as are the upper and middle classes at the present day; but there seems no reason to suppose that such an adaptation cannot ultimately take place.

There is another seemingly important biological objection against any attempt to put a stop to the struggle for existence, which may perhaps have occurred to the reader, but which can fortunately be disposed of very much more rapidly. Evolution, it may be argued, has hitherto taken place in virtue of natural selection. If now the struggle for existence ceases, natural selection must cease too. Will not the human race thus be in danger of physical deterioration, since the mechanism hitherto determining its evolution has been abolished? To this objection there are two answers. First, it may be said that, although the struggle for existence continues, natural selection has already, to a

very great extent, been interfered with in the more civilised countries; charity and medical science now keep alive many, who would die in early youth in a more primitive condition of society. Thus the total abolition of natural selection would only be carrying a step further a tendency which already exists. Modern sociological thought has brought into prominence the evils to which this tendency gives rise, but has at the same time indicated that the remedy lies, not in a return to a more primitive state of social life, in which charity and medicine play no part, but rather in the substitution of a rational selection based on human knowledge for the natural selection based on instinct and survival of the fittest. Now, there can be little doubt that the abolition of the struggle for existence would bring about conditions very favourable for the exercise of rational selection. The thought for the future and the reasoned adaptation of the size of the family to the available means of subsistence (both of which are necessary conditions for the abolition of the struggle for existence) would seem to call into play very much the same qualities, moral and intellectual, as are required for the successful practice of eugenics. Thus we see, as regards the objection on the score of natural selection: (1) that the operation of natural selection has been very largely superseded in civilised societies, quite apart from the abolition of the struggle for existence; (2) that the most generally recognised method for overcoming the evils consequent on a cessation of natural selection is eugenics or rational selection, and that eugenics and the freedom from the struggle for existence would very well go hand in hand.

Besides the shortage of the necessities of life, which we have hitherto been considering, the struggle for existence implies also a shortage of luxuries, *i. e.*, commodities which are not essential for the maintenance of life, but which are intended to add to their owner's comfort or convenience, or to minister to some special desire the gratification of which is not necessary for the continuance of life. Inasmuch as "man shall not live by bread alone," the want of

such commodities is nevertheless a matter of importance in human life, though there is room for considerable difference of opinion as to the real value of all but the simplest forms of luxury.

There are perhaps some good reasons to doubt whether the many luxuries which the wealthy classes of to-day possess cause an increase of happiness at all proportionate to the labour and capital expended in their manufacture. There exists a law of diminishing returns of enjoyment, according to which, for instance, a doubling of the means of pleasure will not produce a doubling of the actual pleasure derived, but something very considerably less than this; while each further unit of expenditure upon the opportunities of enjoyment will produce a smaller increment of the total sum of happiness.⁸ Further, while the pleasure derived from luxury is not as great as might at first be hoped, the use of luxuries increases our susceptibility to pain, should we at any time be compelled to do without them. Travelling in a bus may seem a slow and inconvenient means of locomotion to a man accustomed to the use of his own motor car, while the same bus may seem a comfortable enough vehicle to one whose only alternative is to walk. This is perhaps even more marked as regards the minor luxuries of life, which come to be regarded in the light of necessities by those who are accustomed to possess them. Thus, to be deprived of an unlimited supply of soap and water would appear almost intolerable to many members of the richer classes, while the same deprivation probably causes but a minimum of discomfort to many hundred thousands of the poor. We must not, therefore, conclude that the shortage of luxuries among large sections of the community brings with it as much pain as would the same shortage to those accustomed to their use. In this respect the want of luxuries is quite different from the want

⁸ The case against luxury on these grounds has recently been strikingly presented by Mr. E. J. Urwick in his *Luxury and Waste of Life*, and still more recently by Professor Münsterberg in his chapter on Socialism in *Psychology and Social Sanity*.

of necessities, which must inevitably cause pain wherever it occurs.

But in spite of these objections, the fact remains that in themselves luxuries *do* give pleasure, and are therefore desirable from the hedonistic point of view, so long as their use does not involve an ultimate increase of pain. It is conceivable that, with a decrease in the pressure of population and an increase in the supply of commodities through scientific methods of production, every member of a civilised community would have an ample supply of the lesser luxuries and conveniences, which modern invention has made possible. Such a state of things would seem to be highly desirable if pleasure is the goal of life. If a moderate supply of luxuries is thus defensible from the point of view of pleasure, how does it appear when regarded in the light of our other criterion—perfection? It is often urged that luxuries are inimical to the development of full human powers, inasmuch as they sap the energy of those who enjoy them, depriving them alike of motive and of ability for vigorous work. We have really answered this objection already, when dealing with the effects produced on human nature by the removal of the stimulus to activity afforded by the lack of necessities. We saw that there are many who, though amply supplied with the necessities of life, nevertheless continue to manifest a high degree of activity. Now the vast majority of those, whose means place them beyond the struggle for existence, are also enjoying the daily use of luxuries. Thus the same evidence which shows that actual want is not a necessary condition for the full exercise of human powers, proves also that the possession of luxuries does not necessarily interfere with such exercise. Indeed, it is easy to see that there exist many people who, though amply supplied with luxuries, nevertheless lead strenuous and useful lives. Further, it is evident that many luxuries are of a nature to stimulate rather than to weaken activity and that they provide fresh opportunities for the development and exercise of human powers. Such luxuries as the tennis court, golf course,

gymnasium, and swimming bath, give opportunity for the healthy development of the body; foreign travel widens the mental outlook, provides numerous fresh sources of interest, and leads to a more sympathetic and understanding attitude towards other nations and races; while it is generally agreed that the more intellectual and æsthetic luxuries, such as music, literature, drama, and the fine arts, give rise to some of the highest and most desirable activities of the human mind. Indeed, it is sufficiently evident that it is possible to attain a far higher and more "all round" standard of human development with the aid of luxuries than without them, since in the latter case all activity is directed to the obtaining and enjoyment of the mere necessities of life, and is, therefore, of a comparatively simple and monotonous character. The desire for luxurious and unnecessary things is one of the most distinctively human features of our minds (though the elaborate and beautiful "secondary sexual characteristics" of some animals show that they are not entirely devoid of rudimentary æsthetic appreciation), and the gratification and furtherance of this desire would seem to be a necessary condition for the fullest possible development of our essential human nature. Luxuries may undoubtedly be abused—as indeed may any other useful or desirable things—but that does not constitute an argument against their possession by the normal human being.

The case for the enjoyment of luxuries would seem thus to be even stronger from the point of view of perfection than from the point of view of pleasure; and the continuance of the struggle for existence, which necessarily precludes large numbers from any considerable amount of such enjoyment, appears therefore all the more ethically undesirable.

IV.

Let us turn now, in conclusion, for a few moments, to a consideration of war and the struggle for existence between groups. Here our task is made easier by the fact that few, if any, serious thinkers uphold war from the point

of view of pleasure. It is true that the soldier, pent up in barracks and long denied the true exercise of his profession, may greet with delight the prospect of a campaign; it is also true that many who have been engaged in monotonous or uncongenial occupations will joyfully adopt the soldier's trade, with all its trials and dangers; but, at best, war is an exceedingly expensive method of obtaining the excitement and exercise which most healthy natures seek, and of late years it has become generally recognised that, on the whole, war between modern nations causes far more pain than pleasure. It is doubtful whether, under present-day conditions, war even forms an adequate outlet for the combative impulse (it is difficult to conceive that there can be much pleasure in fighting an enemy who is for the most part invisible); while against the agreeable excitement of the combatants—which could probably be obtained in nearly the same degree by almost any other venturesome undertaking—we have to consider the pains and discomforts of the wounded, the anxieties and sorrows of relatives, and the widespread miseries and privations consequent upon the economic disturbance in the hostile countries.

Although there are few, if any, who regard war as an asset from the point of view of pleasure, there are still quite a number of writers who uphold war from the point of view of perfection; and it would seem that this view of the function of war has considerable influence with the more thoughtful members of the great military organizations of Europe. By followers of this school it is maintained that war is a moral tonic, by which many of the virtues (such as self-sacrifice, love of country, etc.) are strengthened, and which forms a necessary corrective to what they are inclined to regard as the petty and egoistic spirit fostered by the modern life of commerce. The attitude is not a new one: at all times and places the soldier has regarded himself as morally and socially superior to the artificer or merchant, and it is, of course, impossible to deny that war may strengthen and develop certain

desirable aspects of human nature. Nevertheless, the deeper and more earnest moralists of every age and country have, almost without exception, regarded a condition of peace as a higher social state than that of war. Against the ennobling effects which war may have in certain cases, we must weigh the very real moral deterioration to which most serious students of modern campaigns have drawn attention. At its best, war leads to a one-sided development, a philistinism, a blind obedience to authority, which must be inimical to the fullest possible development of the human powers; at its worst, it leads to a more or less complete letting loose of many anti-social tendencies, the adequate repression or modification of which it has taken mankind generations to acquire.

Even as regards the actual benefits derived from war, it is doubtful whether they cannot be obtained in even greater degree in time of peace. The self-sacrifice, the hard work, the wholesome discipline, which are required from the soldier, are required also from those who aspire to success in the industrial, the artistic, the scientific, or the professional life. As regards the struggle for existence among civilised nations, the exercise of the sterner virtues in the arts of peace is to-day much more important than it is in the arts of war, since the relative growth and prosperity of peoples is determined chiefly by progress in industry and science and but little by their ability in war.⁹ Even the highly desirable social virtues underlying the better forms of patriotism can probably be cultivated without the help of war. There are conquests of peace as well as conquests of war, and it is possible to serve one's country at least as efficiently by improving her position as regards social, industrial, scientific, or artistic achievement, as by increasing her political or military power.

Finally, it is possible for patriotism itself to be modified so as to embrace a larger part of humanity than the race or nation in which we have been reared. A community of culture and of economic interests between the nations, as

⁹ Cf. Norman Angell, "*The Great Illusion*," Part II, ch. 4.

well as the increasing understanding bred of closer contact, are gradually making possible a patriotism which applies to the whole of the civilised world and which manifests itself in love and labour for humanity rather than for any restricted portion of our fellow men.

Considered ethically, war would thus seem to be in much the same condition as the struggle for existence between the individual members of a single community. Whether we take pleasure or perfection as our criterion, war between civilised nations can scarcely claim to do more good than it does harm; and it is possible to show that the alleged benefits of war could probably be obtained in even greater degree by a modification or sublimation of the energies involved.¹⁰

V.

We have now studied the many different aspects of our problem as thoroughly as the limited scope of this article permits. We started from the question whether the struggle for existence in human society was desirable or not. Before attempting to give an answer, we found it necessary (1) to decide upon some criterion by which to judge the ethical value of the struggle, (2) to come to some agreement as to the precise facts relating to the struggle for existence at the present day. As to (1), we decided to accept pleasure and perfection as our two criteria. As regards (2), we found that the struggle for existence is still operative in human society of today, but that it is tending to cease and that it is within human power to delay or to hasten its cessation. We then saw that neither for the struggle between individuals nor for the struggle between groups can it be claimed that it is productive of greater pleasure and less pain than a state in which there is no struggle. Similarly, judging from the criterion of human perfection, the cessation of the struggle appeared more desirable than its continuance.

¹⁰ I am, of course, aware that there may be wars which, in so far as they tend to replace a lower civilisation by a higher one or to defend a higher against a lower one, may be justifiable on the ground we have been considering. Such wars, however, must always become increasingly rare as civilisation extends.

Our conclusion would thus seem to be that, from the point of view of the ethical criteria we have adopted, we may look with equanimity upon the course that things are taking. We may perhaps even go further than this, and assert that we have ethical justification for endeavoring to hasten forward the time when the struggle for existence in human society shall be no more; thus contributing, if our conclusions are correct, in some small degree to the greater pleasure and perfection of mankind in our own generation. Whether we decide to participate actively in the social forces which are tending to put an end to the struggle for existence, or to content ourselves with passive contemplation of the working of these forces, it is well to remember that we are the privileged spectators of what is probably one of the most momentous periods of human history—the moment when mankind is definitely freeing itself from the methods of evolution common to all the other races of the earth, and is preparing to carve out its destiny in future by methods of its own devising. Surely such a moment must present many and varied problems to every student of the social sciences—problems, moreover, of the highest practical and theoretical importance. Are they not, perhaps, worthy of greater consideration than they have yet received at the hands of moral philosophy?

J. C. FLÜGEL.

LONDON, ENGLAND.